

## **Evaluation of the Comprehensive Child Development Program**

*In 1988, Congress, concerned about extremely at-risk low-income young children and families, created the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP). As implemented, the CCDP tested whether a newly designed community service delivery program that identified family needs and referred families to different services would result in improved developmental outcomes for children and self-sufficiency for families. HHS, which administered the program, released an evaluation with the finding that the CCDP did not produce the results sought. Though the final evaluation was issued today, HHS had preliminary reports of the less than successful program results. HHS has already incorporated important lessons from CCDP, especially that of the need to provide intensive services that directly affect young children's developmental experiences, into the design of the new Early Head Start and the revised performance standards of the entire Head Start program to assure better outcomes for young children and their families.*

### **What is the CCDP?**

Between 1989 and 1993, 34 demonstration projects were funded, with 21 the subject of evaluation research by Abt Associates and CSR, Inc. Case managers linked families to specific services in their communities or programs created services within their agencies to meet particular family needs. In general, the families were comprised of young, largely minority, very low-income mothers with low educational attainment who tended to be single, unemployed and dependent on public assistance. The evaluation randomly assigned over 4,000 families to either an experimental or control group. In 1994, Congress directed a phased closing of the projects by 1998.

### **No significant results compared to other families**

Both interim and final evaluation results of the CCDP showed that there were no consistent differences for families participating in the program as compared to families who did not. The Abt Associates' evaluation did find that "changes were observed in the lives of CCDP families (e.g., increases in children's achievement scores, in the percentage of mothers in the labor force, and in average household income). However, exactly the same kind of changes observed in CCDP families also occurred in control group families." The evaluation offered several possible reasons for the results of the program, including initial difficulties in implementing the projects, in some cases project families may have been unintentionally referred to services of low or poor quality, the project relied on indirect efforts (such as primarily focusing on helping parents improve their parenting skills) which could not directly improve child outcomes on their own, and some families were resourceful enough to find services in their own community. However, the most compelling finding was that the program did not provide sufficiently direct intensive child development services to be effective.

### **Intensive early childhood services work**

The most productive result of the demonstration is a clear understanding that intensive, focused services provided directly to children and linked to distinctly defined outcomes are critical to success. As the evaluation asserted, several recent studies confirm that early childhood programs achieve important benefits and the most impressive long-term effects on children's cognitive development and on mothers' parenting skills and behaviors when the families participated in intensive early childhood programs. The evaluation confirms, "...the best way to achieve positive effects is to provide intensive services directly to the individuals that you hope to affect."

**Early Head Start and Head Start already focus on direct intensive child services**

Already, the lessons from the CCDP have been incorporated into the policies and designs of Early Head Start and the newly revised performance standards for the entire Head Start program to provide more effective interventions for young children and families in poverty. In both Early Head Start and Head Start, intensive learning and developmental services are provided directly to children and their families, combined with connections to other community services to meet family needs. For Early Head Start, which serves children aged 0 to 3, the key program elements are intensive child development, engaging parents as partners in the developmental process of their children and supporting them in improving their self-sufficiency. These principles are also included in the new Head Start Performance Standards guiding the programs serving three- and four-year-old children. Those Standards now more clearly define appropriate and necessary linkages of the program's central child development mission to community-based health, mental health, social service and employment services. The Head Start combination of direct intensive services to children and referrals to supplemental services reflect the best research and evaluation of how to achieve effective and long-term results for children and their families. In 1998, Head Start will benefit approximately 830,000 children and their families, including about 38,000 low-income infants and toddlers in Early Head Start. With the Balanced Budget Act of 1996, Head Start will reach President Clinton's goal of serving 1 million children in 2002.